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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002874

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2013

TAGS: PREL EAID PGOV AF PK SA IN

SUBJECT: INDIA,S CONTRIBUTION TO AFGHAN RECONSTRUCTION

Classified By: Acting POLCOUNS Lesslie Viguerie for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a November 5 meeting with Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Michael Delaney, Ministry of External Affairs Joint Secretary (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran) T.C.A. Raghavan discussed India,s involvement in reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan. Raghavan explained that India,s contribution to Afghan reconstruction consists primarily of infrastructure development (roads, communication), trade development, and people-to-people exchanges. Raghavan also reiterated India,s disapproval of Saudi and UAE reconciliation talks with the Taliban and of British tribal-centered efforts in Helmand. End Summary.

Building Roads

¶2. (C) Delaney began by expressing USG appreciation for the efforts India has made to date in Afghan reconstruction. Raghavan replied by enthusiastically pointing out the recently finished road India built from Zaranj to Delaram. &We built the road, which is quite an achievement8, Raghavan exclaimed, explaining that India had chosen to build this section of the road because of the easy access to the area through Iran, but which then became a very difficult area to work in given the security environment. Although proud of what he described as a great contribution to Afghan reconstruction, Raghavan stated that he understood the road had ended up providing the Taliban with increased mobility. Even with 400 Indian security personnel along the road, there has been an average of four attacks per week in the last four months, according to the Joint Secretary. The Indians are now looking to build another road from Kabul north to Uzbekistan, Raghavan stated.

Trade is the Only Way

¶3. (C) Despite Afghanistan,s dire security and economic situation, Raghavan was confident that India,s development assistance program there was making a difference. Raghavan felt that in order to exploit the trading potential that exists in the south, and to diminish the influence of the Taliban, there needs to be more focus on the Pashtun truck drivers who &would sell to anyone8 as they operate more

like traders than tribal members, and can therefore be swayed either way. Raghavan emphasized the need to open the borders for trade between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, saying this was &the only long-term solution to stabilizing the situation8 given the largely untapped potential of the large Indian market for Afghan goods.

Afghans Educated in India

¶4. (SBU) As part of its Afghan reconstruction efforts, India four years ago initiated an education program whereby colleges in India accept a total of 500 Afghan high school graduates per year. Raghavan told Delaney he was quite comfortable with the selection process and felt it was probably a fair and transparent one, due to the high interest in and competitive nature of the program. To be accepted into the program, the students take an exam that is administered by the Afghan Ministry of Education, which then recommends individuals for the program.

¶5. (C) Raghavan described this program as India,s most ambitious effort toward aiding Afghan human resource development and explained that unlike similar programs in Germany or the U.S., the Afghan students who participate in this program would prefer to return to Afghanistan after they graduate. The first cohort of 500 students, who came to India in 2004, will graduate next year, and according to Raghavan, all of them will return to Afghanistan upon graduation. The financial cost of this program to India does

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not amount to very much, Raghavan explained, because the Afghan students are subsidized at the same low rates as Indian nationals.

¶6. (C) India also offers 500 scholarships for vocational workers to come to India and improve their skills in practical applications, such as plumbing, carpentry, and mechanics, Raghavan noted.

¶7. (SBU) Another program India offers is to rehabilitate &war widows8 by teaching eligible women how to manage domestic enterprises, such as sewing. Raghavan mentioned that many of these women will present their work at the India International Trade Fair at the end of November. The challenge with this program is that such training often proves unsustainable, Raghavan believed.

Other Projects to Target Unemployed

¶8. (SBU) Delaney stressed the importance in soaking up unemployment, especially in the south where approximately 40 percent of fighting-age males are jobless. Raghavan replied that India will try to establish an Agriculture University near Kabul next year. Among other success stories, he cited the construction of a packaging plant and a cold storage facility in Kandahar from which pomegranates are exported to Dubai. Delaney asked that the GOI consider where else it can help, given that there is need in Afghanistan for almost any type of reconstruction assistance imaginable.

Raghavan,s Disapproval of Taliban Talks

¶9. (C) Raghavan said he was &very disturbed8 by the Saudi and United Arab Emirates initiative to engage with the Taliban. Although dialogue is essential, he explained, it was the quality of the dialogue that mattered, and he described this attempt at dealing with radicals as an improvisation. Discussions should take place from a position of strength, he emphasized. Raghavan expressed similar criticism of the British approach in trying to negotiate with individual tribes in Helmand province.

¶10. (U) AUSTR Delaney has cleared this cable.
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